

December 8, 2015

Dear Senator Fischer,

I write to commend you and your staff for your work on the Securing America's Future Energy: Protecting Infrastructure of Pipelines and Enhancing Safety (SAFE PIPES) Act (S. 2276) and, specifically, for working with me and my staff to include a provision in this legislation that requires the Secretary of Transportation to issue much needed safety standards for interstate underground natural gas storage facilities. The current lack of oversight of these facilities is a topic that hits close to home for my fellow Kansans and me.

On January 17, 2001, eight miles northwest of Hutchinson, Kansas, technicians at an interstate underground natural gas storage field noticed a dramatic drop in pressure in a salt cavern they had been filling with natural gas. What they were observing was compressed natural gas leaking from the Yaggy storage field. As a result, the escaped natural gas traveled approximately nine miles underground, then rose to the surface resulting in an explosion in the downtown area of Hutchinson, where two businesses were destroyed and 26 others were damaged.

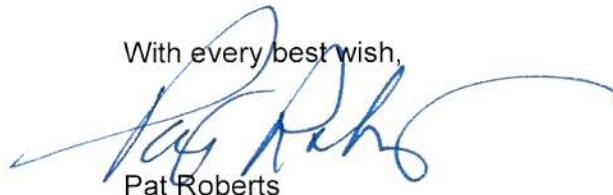
Then on January 18, 2001, another explosion in a mobile home park nearby tragically took the lives of two individuals. The Kansas National Guard was subsequently called in to help evacuate parts of the city affected by the gas leaks. The events surrounding the gas explosions were nationally broadcast across the country.

In direct response, the Kansas state legislature and Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) worked together to formulate common sense regulations to ensure the safety of interstate underground natural gas storage in Kansas. However, a lawsuit in 2009 challenged the KCC's jurisdiction over interstate gas storage facilities located within the state.

In the end, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiff and determined federal law pre-empted state regulation of interstate gas storage fields; therefore invalidating the actions of the state legislature and the KCC in the wake of the explosions. The court's decision left 11 interstate natural gas storage fields (comprised of more than 800 wells) in Kansas unregulated.

It has been nearly 15 years since the natural gas explosion in Hutchison took the lives of two Kansans. I applaud your work to provide oversight of interstate underground natural gas storage facilities, and it is my hope common sense legislation can be enacted to prevent a similar tragedy from occurring again in the future.

With every best wish,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Pat Roberts', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Pat Roberts